United Nations A/58/PV.22

General Assembly

Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

22nd plenary meeting
Thursday, 2 October 2003, 3 p.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Aïchatou Mindaoudou, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of Niger.

Mrs. Mindaoudou (*spoke in French*): Niger is gratified by your election, Sir, to preside over this session and through me assures you of its full support as you carry out the important mission that has been entrusted to you. We wish you every success.

I also wish to address to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, my sincere congratulations on the skill, dedication and foresight with which he guided the work of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session.

I should further like to reiterate Niger's great appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the wisdom and efficiency with which he has guided our Organization in a particularly difficult international context.

On 19 August, sadly, international terrorism struck yet another symbol: United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. The attack claimed many lives, including that of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Sergio Vieira de Mello. Niger reiterates its unequivocal condemnation of that barbaric act and reviles all terrorist acts committed anywhere in the world.

The Government of Niger welcomes our Organization's determination to provide all necessary assistance to the Iraqi people, despite all the intimidation to which it has been subject. Such determination, however, can achieve results only if the United Nations is given a key role in managing the process of rebuilding a free and democratic Iraq that is the master of its own destiny.

The maintenance of international peace and security must remain a priority objective of the United Nations. In this respect, in addition to our ongoing war against international terrorism, we must pursue our efforts to free the world from the specter of weapons of mass destruction and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. In that connection, the First Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects at the National, Regional and Global Levels noted that, despite progress made since the adoption of the Programme of Action, control of firearms and their use remains limited. That is why Niger firmly supports the elaboration of binding legal instruments on the marking, tracking and sale of such weapons.

For Niger, the regional approach must be given pride of place in the settlement of conflicts, since it is

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

03-53876 (E)

increasingly recognized that most conflicts in Africa have a subregional dimension. That is the case in particular in West Africa, where stability in the Mano River region is linked to the situation in Liberia. It is also the case in Central Africa, where stability in the Great Lakes region is linked to the situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Burundi. That is why the Government of Niger feels that the strengthening of regional peacekeeping and security capacities, the cornerstone of the collective security system, must be based on enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations.

With regard to the Jammu and Kashmir conflict, Niger believes that, despite the recent incidents, the improved relations between India and Pakistan, which opened diplomatic relations in August, provide an unprecedented opportunity that must be seized to achieve a political settlement through the organization of a referendum on the self-determination of the Kashmiri people, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

In the Middle East, the vision of a sovereign and viable Palestinian State, peacefully coexisting with Israel, must become a reality. In this regard, it is more urgent than ever before for the two parties to the conflict to agree to a ceasefire, comprehensive adherence to which would help relaunch the road map, which is showing signs of withering. Moreover, the eventful history of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process — a history marked by recurrent setbacks and dashed hope — requires us to acknowledge that only the presence of an international interposition force can guarantee an end to the bloody violence and create conditions for the effective implementation of agreements. Thus, Niger makes a heartfelt appeal to the United Nations, the Security Council in particular, to ensure that this question be reconsidered with all due attention and in full responsibility in the interest of world peace.

Niger is deeply dedicated to the noble ideals of the Charter and therefore strives for regional and global peace and is actively participating in efforts to achieve general and complete disarmament. In that context, my country has always subscribed to the standards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in order to achieve full transparency in the production, sale and delivery of uranium. That position is reflected in our decade-long cooperation with all actors in the uranium sector. We allow for no ambiguity. Niger continues to be ready, as it has always been, to submit to the authority of the IAEA for any verification related to the production and sale of its uranium.

I wish to recall that, in this sphere, my country, in accordance with article III of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, has accepted, in agreement with the IAEA, the monitoring and guarantee system which, when implemented in good faith as it is in Niger, offers absolutely no opportunity for the kind of clandestine transactions of which my country was so unjustly accused.

The Development Goals defined in the historic Millennium Declaration must remain an ongoing concern of the international community and guide global action aimed at the establishment of a stable and just socio-economic order involving greater sharing and solidarity. We cannot overemphasize the fact that the achievement of these Goals requires reflection in specific action of all commitments undertaken at the major international conferences and summits.

What in fact have we been seeing? The international scene continues to offer the paradoxical and somewhat ignominious image of a world of enormous wealth in which the overwhelming majority of inhabitants still lives in total destitution. Despite the commitments made and the consensus reached by Governments of the entire world on this issue, we are obliged to note that the terrible vise of poverty, ignorance and disease has only been tightened around the poor peoples of the third world in general and of Africa in particular. When we know, for example, that, six years after the World Food Summit, 815 million people throughout the world continue to suffer from hunger and 150 million children suffer from malnutrition deficiencies, we can readily gauge the feeble support of donors for anti-poverty strategies, despite the lofty statements of intention that are occasionally mouthed.

Today more than ever, the situation should pull at the conscience of the international community and inspire us to greater solidarity and determination to fulfil our commitments. It is time to understand once and for all that the reduction of poverty is more than a moral imperative; it is in fact a secure investment in the promotion of a world of peace, prosperity and social progress.

It is encouraging to note that, in recent years, Africa has been at the core of major international conferences. From the Brussels Conference on the Least Developed Countries to the Johannesburg Summit, as well as the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development, the World Economic Forum, the Evian G-8 summit and the World Trade Organization (WTO) Conference in Cancún, to name but a few, Africa has been at the heart of the debates.

It should be noted that, while these meetings had the merit of having been convened, unfortunately they did not respond to the urgent and enormous expectations of the continent. In this regard, there is a need to ensure consistency in global economic governance through the strengthening of cooperation among the international organizations and of the compatibility of their decisions. It is only thus that the excessive marginalization of Africa can be alleviated, because this is the appropriate way to bring the promises of increased official development assistance to fruition. Similarly, it is important to increase the flow of direct foreign investment into Africa.

Furthermore, given the limited results achieved by current debt-alleviation programmes — the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative in particular — we must now recognize that the ultimate solution lies in the outright cancellation of the debt, the servicing of which is consuming the greater part of the budgets of African countries and fuelling capital flight. There is also a need for Africa's trade partners fully to comply with their commitments, in particular by improving the access of African products to their markets and by eliminating agricultural subsidies that create distortions in world trade.

The failure of the WTO Conference in Cancún is a good illustration of the obstinate reluctance of the rich countries to take into account the legitimate aspirations of the poor countries regarding the establishment of just and equitable standards to govern world trade. And yet, solving the critical problem of agricultural subsidies and of access to markets would have made it possible both to enhance the badly tarnished credibility of the WTO and to provide a measure of consistency to the declarations of intention made by the countries of the North. Above all and unquestionably, it would have contributed to raising millions of people out of poverty. This lack of agreement means that the cotton workers of West Africa, among others, can no longer live from their labour and may be excluded from international trade, to the benefit of more competitive producers who are being subsidized.

Cancún was a failed rendezvous of the Doha Round. WTO will certainly have to adopt a new approach and prioritize the settlement of agricultural problems, which most agree are more important than the interests of the multinationals.

The countries of Africa are fully aware of the need to develop their relationship with their development partners within the context of interdependence, cooperation and mutual responsibility. In that regard, they acknowledge the importance of judicious national policies and good governance, which they consider to be indispensable to accelerated development and, above all, to achieving the 7 per cent growth rate required to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is inspired by this consensual approach, based on a new relationship of cooperation between Africa and the developed world. NEPAD, a symbol of Africa's resolve to take its own destiny in hand, is the foundation on which the African Union will rely to promote the growth and sustainable development of African countries, individually and collectively.

While we call for a massive flow of investments and the growth of official development assistance to contribute to our development efforts, we, too, must comply with our commitments in terms of mutual responsibility. That is why my country, Niger, firmly supports the implementation of the NEPAD Peer Review Mechanism. The Mechanism will play a key role in the continent's prospects as an instrument for building strong States dedicated to good governance and sustainable development.

In drawing up through a participatory approach a national strategy for poverty reduction, the Government of Niger intends to become deeply involved in the dynamic process of establishing strong, stable and competitive economies in accordance with the objectives of the NEPAD Programme of Action. The strategy document serves simultaneously as a reference framework for poverty reduction policies and programmes and as an instrument to mobilize financial resources. We are convinced that the implementation of the poverty-reduction strategy will contribute to

improving the dialogue of policies, to further strengthening donor coordination and intervention, and to developing a multidimensional strategic partnership to translate into action the deepest hopes of the people of Niger.

From this rostrum, I solemnly reaffirm the deep gratitude of the Government of Niger to those international partners which, at the poverty-reduction forum held last June in Niamey, proved their full adherence to the strategy and their commitment to supporting its implementation.

In recent years, the world has undergone rapid and profound changes. These require us to adapt our Organization's functions to today's reality in order to better to take into account the new challenges and legitimate aspirations of the peoples of the planet and not the specific interests of a tiny group of countries, no matter how powerful. That is why Niger firmly supports the courageous reforms proposed by the Secretary-General to strengthen and improve the functioning of the Organization and to allow it effectively to cope with the challenges of our times. The long-awaited democratization of the Security Council must be accompanied by a strengthening of the role of the General Assembly, the highest representative body, and of the Economic and Social Council, the guarantor of the advent of a new economic and social order.

The United Nations is at a decisive juncture and must urgently regain the confidence of States and of world public opinion, which has been sorely tested by recent events. It is up to all of us to strive resolutely to that end, because, as the Secretary-General has said, we are the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Maria Levens, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Suriname.

Mrs. Levens (Suriname): On behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Suriname, I would at the outset like to take this opportunity to extend to you, Sir, a fellow brother of the Caribbean, and to the other members of the Bureau my sincere congratulations on your unanimous election to guide the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

Suriname shares in the satisfaction experienced by the Caribbean region. We are convinced that, given your vast diplomatic experience and skills, you will be able to guide the affairs of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly in a most effective manner. In this regard, I can assure you that Suriname will support you in every possible way.

My delegation would also like to express its gratitude to Mr. Jan Kavan, the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, for the manner in which he chaired the affairs of this organ. We wish him well in his future endeavours.

Likewise, my Government would like to reiterate its support for Secretary-General Kofi Annan. His dedication to the goals and spirit of the Organization has been exemplary and has served him well in protecting the interests of humanity.

My Government strongly deplores the atrocious terrorist attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. Our thoughts are with the Secretary-General and with the bereaved families of those who perished as a result of the incident. We especially mourn the demise of Sergio Vieira de Mello, a dedicated United Nations staff member who laboured for the benefit of many troubled societies.

The opportunities that arise from developments in the world today are, unfortunately, not within reach of all the world's children. This world order, which is well-developed on the one side, copes with serious development setbacks in the economic and social sectors on the other. Economic downfalls, declining health services and the persistence of an international non-supportive environment are all circumstances that affect the ability of Governments, in particular in the developing countries, to adequately implement policies that are required. There exists a wider disparity between the haves and the have-nots, not only in economic terms, but also in terms of opportunities offered by the rapid development in the digital sector. Globalization can become an avenue to global development only if it becomes all-inclusive and assumes a human face.

This idea was behind the sense of urgency and understanding that participants in the global consultative process for development cooperation brought to the meetings in Doha, Monterrey and Johannesburg. These meetings generated the needed political commitment and momentum, as did the Millennium Summit, at the highest political level. We must maintain this momentum and continue to

demonstrate the political will and energy to implement the decisions carefully drafted at these meetings.

To accelerate progress towards these goals, there is a need for a set of policies that generate stronger economic growth, complemented by action to enhance the capabilities of poor people to participate in growth and to access key social services. As agreed in Doha and in Monterrey, these efforts should enjoy stronger support from the international community, in particular through increased market access for developing countries.

My Government also holds the view that it is necessary for all relevant actors to continue to be involved in the process that should lead to the coordinated and integrated implementation of the outcomes of these meetings. Such an approach should put us on a path of economic and social development that reduces poverty and works for all the world's peoples.

International peace and security predominantly occupy the international agenda. The maintenance of international peace and security is a major concern of the international community, as declining security affects the protection of human rights and the very existence of all human beings. It is therefore important that global security be based on a secured and just framework that promotes the peaceful coexistence of all States. The Government of Suriname is of the considered view that the United Nations and its Charter offer the best guarantee for the maintenance of international peace and security. Abidance by the security framework laid down in the Charter is therefore of utmost importance.

Declining security affects every member of the international community. It is therefore essential to increase the involvement of the general membership of the Organization in the agenda and work of the Security Council, while an increase in the membership of the Council should reflect the international political and economic realities and security needs of contemporary global society.

The principle of human-centred security might offer the best possible and most effective road to travel in order to meet the security needs of today's world. A commitment to human-centred security will generate more integrated international cooperation in many related fields, from conflict prevention to disarmament, including respect for the rule of law and for human rights.

The United Nations must continue to be innovative in its search for effective ways and means to increase global security. We must continue to argue for more tolerance and understanding among peoples. Suriname is one of the most ethnically varied nations in the world, where people of different religions and racial backgrounds live and work peacefully together, and with a Government and Parliament in which Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Jews form one front to collectively work on the development of our country.

The dialogue among civilizations, in particular among religions, must be encouraged. We must furthermore seek to remove those circumstances that give rise to situations that foster global insecurity. This task must be given a central place in any overall strategy to increase international peace and security. Maintaining international peace and security must increasingly become a common responsibility involving all actors, Governments and peoples alike. The restructuring of the United Nations must also result in achieving a more effective General Assembly.

It is important that the General Assembly be perceived by the general public as an important international body contributing to its development and prosperity. A restructured General Assembly, as the sole universal deliberative body, must continue to spearhead the debate on development, but must also incorporate into its agenda other issues of a global nature that are of special importance to humanity.

The common task ahead is to collectively work towards sustainable human development and to create a global society in which equity, equality and equal rights and opportunities exist for all human beings and extreme poverty can be eradicated. Achieving such a global society requires the involvement, determination and commitment of every Government, civil society and business sector, as well as coordinated and comprehensive actions by all these actors in the global fight against poverty and injustice.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Lewis Brown, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Liberia.

Mr. Brown (Liberia): I am honoured to participate, on behalf of Mr. Moses Zeh Blah, President of the Republic of Liberia, in the general debate of the

General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session, and to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. I express the confidence of the Government of Liberia that you will faithfully honour the responsibilities which you have been assigned.

I also wish to commend Mr. Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic for the able manner in which he steered the activities of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

Undoubtedly, Mr. Kofi Annan deserves the commendation of this Assembly for his stewardship of our global Organization and the excellent leadership which he exudes in the resolution of international questions, ranging from terrorism to the deadly AIDS pandemic and from poverty to the imbalance in global trade and commerce.

We must also pay a special tribute to Sergio Vieira de Mello and other United Nations workers who lost their lives in selfless humanitarian service in Iraq. Those citizens of the world embodied the spirit of the United Nations and are true representatives of the conscience of humanity.

Terrorism, the menace to international peace and security, has brought immeasurable grief to the world. Acts of terrorism have elicited neither the understanding nor the empathy of the world for causes to which terrorists may aspire. Contrarily, acts of terrorism have rightly ignited widespread disdain and revulsion for their perpetrators. Today, terrorism seeks to undermine our collective freedom and therefore requires our collective will and efforts to combat this common enemy.

However, this objective is being undermined by the lack of international consensus. The unwillingness to garner and work along lines of international consensus has exposed cracks in our efforts to fight terrorism, bringing into scrutiny the structure of this world body and the continued relevance of the Security Council. When the Security Council appears divided on fundamental questions of international security, the world becomes vulnerable. A divided Security Council fertilizes the grounds for the germination of international terror and insecurity. If the Security Council is to serve as the guarantor of international peace and security, then that organ must of necessity be guided by mechanisms that ensure the judicious development of consensus and respect for and adherence to international law.

Additionally, our united condemnation of and fight against terrorism must never stoop to the employment of methods not far removed from those used by terrorists themselves. To fight fire with fire will leave our global village without a single hut. We must muster the will to tackle the issues that are exploited by terrorists and terrorist organizations.

The conflict in the Middle East has inescapably attracted the attention of the world, posing the greatest challenge to international peace and security. We are saddened by and deeply concerned about the recent turn of events, which has occasioned the virtual debunking of the road map for peace and ensured a classic return to violence. Admittedly, there are serious difficulties in the search for peace for our brothers and sisters of that troubled region. However, these difficulties should neither beset us with a sense of hopelessness nor obscure the agonies and the fears that have come to characterize the way of life in the Middle East.

We therefore call on the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to recognize the right to existence of each other within recognized international borders and to foster pragmatic approaches to dialogue, peace, security and the virtues of good-neighbourliness. At the same time, we urge the Security Council to develop, strengthen and maintain international consensus on the way forward.

With respect to the Liberian crisis, since our last address to this Assembly, Liberia has wrestled and continues to wrestle with serious political and security challenges. An insurgency that began four years ago reached the Liberian capital, Monrovia. Unsurprisingly, an already deteriorating humanitarian situation worsened, accompanied by the widespread breakdown of law and order. Regrettably, while recognizing the intensification of the war in Liberia and the right of the Liberian people to self-defence, the Security Council maintained an arms embargo on the Government. This situation catalysed the rapid advance of the insurgents and bestowed upon their cause a false sense of international approbation. The Liberian State teetered on the verge of disintegration.

But for the resilience of the people of Liberia and the timely intervention of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the International

Contact Group on Liberia, Liberia would have slipped into the abyss of unbridled anarchy. We will therefore remain eternally grateful to ECOWAS, and particularly to the Governments and peoples of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Ghana, for their leadership in the quest to stabilize the situation in my country. In a similar manner, the Government of Liberia expresses immense gratitude to the Government of the United States of America, the United Nations, the European Union and the African Union for their respective roles in and continued support for the ongoing efforts to restore lasting peace, security and democracy to Liberia. We must also pay special tribute to the support of the Governments of South Africa and Mozambique.

On 11 August 2003, with the deployment of a vanguard force from the friendly Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the promise of a smooth transfer of power was remarkably fulfilled. This development energized the signing, on 18 August in Accra, Republic of Ghana, of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The Agreement establishes a framework for the formation and installation of a transitional Government, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants and the restructuring of the national security apparatus. It also provides for the repatriation and resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons, the rebuilding of the nation's productive capacity and the creation of democratic space for the conduct of free, fair and credible elections in 2005. These goals cannot be achieved without concerted multinational collaboration and assistance.

The Government of Liberia welcomes the adoption of Security Council resolution 1509 (2003), which establishes the United Nations Mission in Liberia. We pledge our cooperation and support to the realization of the objectives set out in the resolution. Comprehensive disarmament, demobilization and a sustained programme of reintegration and resettlement are sine qua non to peace, security and stability in Liberia and the West African subregion. The Government of Liberia is therefore beholden to the international community, with gratitude for its continuous assistance and support in the search for peace and security in Liberia and the West African subregion. However, unless democratic expressions and aspirations are allowed to flourish through strengthened democratic institutions, and unless an alternative source of livelihood is provided the disarmed combatants, the gains obtained through the support of the international community could be grievously undermined.

In this respect, resolution 1509 (2003), which engenders new hope for Liberia, appears to be contradicted by the demands of resolution 1343 (2001). That resolution imposes and maintains a regime of sanctions and other restrictions on Liberia. Unarguably, economic sanctions imposed under resolution 1343 (2001) becloud Liberia with an undeserved stigma that, in effect, discourages the flow of much-needed international investment into the private sector to support Liberia's post-conflict reconstruction and development programmes and restricts the essential flow of energy needed to revive Liberia's economic infrastructure.

A vibrant private sector is the key to Liberia's recovery and the cure to problems of unemployment, which provides stimulus to social unrest and political instability. If sanctions, smart or targeted, are tools to accomplish political objectives, then they must respond affirmatively to the realization of the objectives. One does not administer medication to a dead person nor does one take medication to cure the illness of another. The Government of Liberia therefore calls on the Security Council to lift its regime of economic sanctions imposed on the country.

In situations such as ours, international goodwill and assistance are often accompanied by the temptation to ignore indigenous expertise largely in favour of expatriates. The net effect of adherence to such temptation is the development of structures and institutions that are neither manageable nor sustainable by the beneficiaries after the departure of the expatriates. Even so, Liberia is blessed with its share of endowments in human and natural resources. As can be expected, years of political turmoil, conflict and mismanagement have resulted in the massive exodus of Liberia's human resources. Welcoming a new opportunity to rebuild a more democratic, accountable and coherent society, Liberians are desperate to return home and contribute. To that end, it is the desire and expectation of the Government and people of Liberia that, as much as is possible, Liberians will be employed at all levels in the post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation of their country.

Liberia is a founding Member of this world body. Irrespective of the current problems we face and our

need for international assistance, Liberia will remain a respectable member of the international community. We intend to uphold our sovereign dignity in the conduct of international affairs. Liberia cannot and will not be a subject of trusteeship.

Like most third-world nations, Liberia is deeply indebted to several international financial institutions and organizations. We are grateful to our creditors for their patience and understanding. Determined as we are to survive, we count on the empathy of the international community to treat our indebtedness with the uniqueness that it deserves and pledge our commitment to working along with those institutions in developing appropriate mechanisms to deal with Liberia's debt. Servicing these debts remains a priority for the Government of Liberia. However, our capacity to make payment is limited by manifold problems occasioned by several years of continuous warfare.

I should now like to turn to the case of the Republic of China. The General Assembly must confront the moral and legal challenges posed by the exclusion of more than 23 million people from representation in this world body. How else are we to explain the denial of the rights of a progressive and industrious people from representation at the level of the General Assembly? The fact remains that the Government and people of the Republic of China on Taiwan have, and continue to engage in, responsible self-governance. It is incontestable that the people of the Republic of China on Taiwan continue to significantly contribute to the improvement of the human family. Their achievements in the spheres of science and technology, commerce and trade, and the arts and culture cannot be ignored.

The undaunted spirit of the great people of the Republic of China aspires to participate in the United Nations. Liberia is convinced that the participation of both sides of the Taiwan Strait in the activities of international organizations will encourage greater understanding and mutual trust between the two sides. That is consistent with the spirit of preventive diplomacy advocated by the United Nations. Liberia therefore reiterates its call for the admission of the Republic of China on Taiwan to the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as the assumption of its rightful place in the discourse and transaction of world affairs.

In conclusion, Liberia is today in urgent need of international assistance and support. While our situation appears to be grim, it is certainly not hopeless. While many of our compatriots may have lost lives and limbs, we are still a forgiving people. While our national infrastructure may have been destroyed, we are still a resilient people. While our dignity may have been impinged upon, we are still a proud people. We Liberians are unified in our determination to work for a better and brighter future. We are united in fostering the faith of our founding fathers to build a nation dedicated to freedom, liberty and justice for all.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Irakli Menagarishvili, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia.

Mr. Menagarishvili (Georgia): Let me begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. Allow me also to express our heartfelt appreciation to Mr. Jan Kavan for his outstanding leadership during the previous session. I would also like to pay tribute to Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello and the United Nations staff members who fell victim to cowardly and blind rage in Baghdad. The dreadful terrorist attack perpetrated against those messengers of peace once again highlighted the danger we face in many corners of the world.

In recent years, the United Nations and the entire world community have come up against challenges that threaten the very basis of the Organization and our collective efforts towards global peace and security. International terrorism, a threat with a global dimension, affects each and every one of us. However, it has become evident that many of the new democracies are particularly vulnerable to that threat. Scarce material resources and the lack of qualified personnel undermine their efforts, highlighting the need for further intensified global cooperation.

Georgia is no exception when it comes to threats posed by international terrorism. However, despite existing difficulties, and with the active support and assistance of our partners, especially the United States, we have made substantial progress. Georgia successfully completed its anti-criminal and anti-terrorist operation in the Pankisi Gorge. We have freed that territory from illegal armed groups and have seized a considerable number of arms and ammunition. I can unequivocally state today that the Pankisi Gorge, which

has been freed of every illegally armed person, no longer poses any threat to Georgia or its neighbours. However, unless the root cause of the Pankisi Gorge problem is settled, namely, the conflict in Chechnya, we cannot consider the problem eliminated. The lesson to be drawn from this experience is that the fight against terrorism, in all its complexity, will be successful only if carried out through concerted international efforts. A single quick-fix operation can cause the problem to resurface at a later stage.

Many of the speakers who spoke before me highlighted the importance of tackling the threat of international terrorism in all its aspects. We cannot but share that notion. Protracted problems, and in particular unresolved conflicts that result in the creation of uncontrolled territories, have become a breeding ground for terrorism. It is only a matter of time until we witness greater ties being forged between separatist leaders and terrorists.

A vivid example of that is the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. That territory, which is under the control of a separatist regime, has turned into a safe haven for criminals, traffickers in drugs and human beings, illegal arms dealers and terrorist groups. The notorious Shamil Basayev, who was recently included on the Counter-Terrorism Committee's terrorist list, has re-established himself as a friend of the separatist authorities and is maintaining active links with the terrorist groups in Abkhazia. In the near future, we will provide the Counter-Terrorism Committee with relevant information on individuals involved in terrorist activities in that region of Georgia.

The record of the United Nations in reaching a comprehensive settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, has been less than satisfactory. After more than 10 years of United Nations involvement, we have not come even a single step closer to a settlement. Blatant violations of human rights and ethnic cleansing of the Georgian population in Abkhazia continue unabated. Despite numerous calls, we have failed to correct even the fundamental flaws in the entire United Nations-led peace process.

We welcome the fact that, since the last session of the General Assembly, the Geneva process has gained a new dimension. We are hopeful that that will give new impetus to the peace process. I would like to stress that this relatively new development is still fragile and that it should be aimed at achieving results, and not at the process itself. We would also like to underline the importance of the recently held summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which reinforced the previous decisions of CIS heads of States putting forth restrictive regulations on political and economic cooperation and contact with Abkhazia, Georgia.

However, despite those positive steps, very little has changed on the ground. In that regard, I am thinking in particular of the illegal unilateral actions undertaken by representatives of the Russian side, and especially by leaders of regional authorities, that significantly damage the peace process. The railway link between Sochi and Sukhumi is still operating unhindered. Despite our appeals at the last session of the General Assembly, the wholesale granting of Russian citizenship to the Abkhaz population has never slowed. Russian passports issued to the inhabitants of the secessionist region have already fallen into hands of terrorists, who are making the best use of free passage in and out of Russia through the Abkhaz and Ossetian sections of the Georgian-Russian border, where our neighbour unilaterally imposes a visa-free regime.

The illegal acquisition of property — including possessions of internally displaced persons — in Abkhazia, Georgia, by State bodies, legal entities and individuals continues. Needless to say, such acts are being carried out in flagrant violation of international law and represent an infringement of Georgia's sovereignty. They run counter to the Georgian law that declares any transaction with the separatist regime null and void.

The illegal presence of the Russian military base in Gudauta is yet another element that is exacerbating the situation in Abkhazia. Georgia insists that the commitment undertaken in accordance with the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe concerning the removal of that base be implemented expeditiously and transparently.

But there must still be hope — hope that we will not again fail the 300,000 internally displaced persons and refugees, whose patience is running thin. Efforts must be redoubled to persuade the Abkhaz side to accept the so-called Boden Document, on the distribution of constitutional competences between Tbilisi and Sokhumi, as a basis for political negotiations.

We have repeatedly noted the failure of the peacekeeping forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States to provide security for returnees. In fact, those forces — which do not even have a United Nations mandate — have done no more than sustain the status quo, virtually functioning as border guards between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia. We cannot hope for any improvement in the situation unless the United Nations takes upon itself the launching, in an internationalized format, of a full-scale peacekeeping operation in Abkhazia. It is through an increased role on the part of the United Nations and through the will of the international community that the unheeding Abkhaz separatists can be forced to compromise. Failing that, the Government of Georgia will have no other choice but to request the Security Council to resort to the measures envisaged under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

The Secretary-General and many other world leaders have duly recognized that the United Nations is passing though one of the most critical phases of its history. New global realities have made it clear that immediate measures ought to be undertaken if we want to ensure the sustainability of the United Nations and to strengthen the confidence of Member States in the Organization.

In his statement before the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly, in 1992, President Shevardnadze of Georgia stated:

> "There is no need to fear reforms when reforms are so necessary, especially, in our view, in the two interrelated fields of peacekeeping and nation-building in the newly independent States." (*A/47/PV.12, p. 36*)

Those sentiments have been duly echoed during the current Assembly session. We should be courageous enough to recognize that reform of the United Nations is essential for the interests of each of us, as well as for our collective good.

It is our belief that Member States can rally around the Secretary-General in his call for the creation of a high-level panel of eminent personalities charged with a multitude of tasks aimed at reforming the United Nations. I reaffirm Georgia's support for expansion of the Security Council. We join the calls to grant Germany and Japan permanent seats on the Council and to increase the number of non-permanent members. Moreover, the decision-making process within the Council should be made more transparent and democratic to ensure that the adoption of necessary resolutions does not fall prey to special, narrow interests.

As we continue to collectively witness changing global realities, the Government of Georgia welcomes the increasing role of regional structures in achieving the fundamental objectives set forth by the United Nations. The efforts of European and Euro-Atlantic structures in the Balkans is just one successful example in that regard. Another vivid example is Afghanistan, where NATO has taken a leading role in the peace-building operation. That organization's role will increase further as a result of its recent expansion. Security issues have become a serious concern for such regional organizations as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization and the GUUAM Participating States — Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Republic of Moldova. Here, we should like to appeal to Member States for support for the GUUAM's efforts to be granted observer status in the General Assembly.

The Millennium Summit and the decisions taken there remain, in our view, one of the most significant achievements of the United Nations. The consensus achieved both at the Monterrey and the Johannesburg Summits are road maps for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. The Government of Georgia supports the objectives and strategies set forth in both outcome documents, considering it imperative that the international community remain on course.

Globalization is becoming an everyday reality. Advances in modern technologies are making that process irreversible. However, it is up to the United Nations to take a more active role in guaranteeing equitable distribution of resources among all nations of the world. It is through increased cooperation, through the streamlining of actions within the United Nations and its bodies, and through the establishment of new partnerships that the Organization must prevail in achieving global sustainable development.

Despite rapidly changing global realities, one thing remains constant: there is a greater need and a greater demand for the United Nations. We remain hopeful that common sense and a common vision of the future will prevail in this unique international body. For our part, we are prepared to do our utmost towards that end.

The President: I now call on His Excellency The Honourable Kalombo Mwansa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Zambia.

Mr. Mwansa (Zambia): Let me begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. My delegation pledges its support and its cooperation to you. I wish you a very successful tenure of office. I also wish to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, for the efficient manner in which he presided over the proceedings of the previous session. In addition, I wish to take this opportunity to commend the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his relentless efforts and dedication to the cause of international peace, security and economic development.

My delegation wishes to express our deepest sympathies to the families of the United Nations staff who died in the terrorist bombing at the United Nations offices in Baghdad on 19 August 2003. Those tragic deaths are an incalculable loss to the United Nations. Such violent acts should not be allowed to continue. My Government also joins other Members of the United Nations in condemning these inhuman acts.

I should like to state that Zambia condemns, in all its forms and manifestations, the terrorism that is occurring in various parts of the world. We pledge to cooperate with the international community in the fight against international terrorism. It is in that vein that the Zambian Government welcomes Security Council resolution 1502 (2003), on the protection of United Nations personnel, associated personnel and humanitarian personnel in conflict zones, which was adopted on 26 August 2003 and which, inter alia, expresses strong condemnation of all forms of violence.

The tragedy in Baghdad underscores the need for concerted efforts to strengthen multilateral approaches to international peace and security. The United Nations should be allowed to lead efforts to achieve comprehensive disarmament in nuclear, chemical and conventional weapons. Terrorists should be denied access to all weapons of mass destruction.

Nuclear, chemical and conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons, pose a serious threat to international peace and security. In Africa, small arms and light weapons, as well as anti-personnel landmines, have destabilized States and have taken a great toll on life and property. My Government is hopeful that this session will advance the horizon of the international disarmament agenda.

Zambia mourns the untimely death of Ms. Anna Lindh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, who dedicated her life to the pursuit of peace, social progress and development. My country will miss her friendship, dynamism and broad understanding of developmental issues.

As a peace-loving Member State, Zambia will continue to cooperate with and to support the efforts of the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), established by the Security Council to fight terrorism. The CTC should be encouraged to work to raise the capacities of Member States to fight international terrorism. Emphasis should be placed on addressing linkages between terrorism, money-laundering and organized crime, which are among the most serious challenges to stability and peace in our era.

The strength of the United Nations lies in its legitimacy, founded on the bedrock of principles of international law accepted by all Member States. It is essential that the conduct of international affairs be in conformity with those principles. The common security agenda should reflect a global consensus on all major threats to peace and security. The spirit of cooperation based on the shared values of equality and sovereignty, which are enshrined in our Charter, is a source of our strength.

Poverty is the greatest impediment to development. Poverty reduction therefore remains the foremost priority of developing countries and should continue to feature highly on the agenda of the United Nations. It is regrettable that, since the Millennium Declaration three years ago, indications are that most developing countries risk falling short of achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. This is largely due to lack of resources and capacity and weaknesses in national and global economies. Zambia continues to strive to implement those goals.

Globalization has brought about both opportunities and challenges. But the current world economic conditions are unfavourable to developing countries in general, and to the least developed countries in particular. Unless there is an increase in the flow of the official development assistance (ODA), foreign direct investment and other forms of assistance, it will be difficult for these countries to come out of the

vicious circle of poverty and lack of development. This situation is exacerbated by the huge external debts that the least developed countries are struggling to pay off.

Given their economic problems, the least developed countries, of which 34 out of 49 are in Africa, there is need for support from the international community within the framework of the 2001 Brussels Plan of Action. In that vein, I wish also to urge developed countries to honour their pledges to meet the target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national product offered as ODA to developing countries.

While we welcome the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative in addressing the external debt, there is a need to broaden and ease the process of accessing funds. Equally important, developing countries need easy access to the markets of the developed countries. This is important to stimulate economic growth. To level the playing field, my delegation calls for the removal of agricultural subsidies in developed countries, which have contributed to the adverse and poor terms of trade for the developing countries.

Zambia regrets the failure to achieve a consensus at the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference at Cancún. There is an urgent need to overcome the impasse that emerged. Developed countries should demonstrate a give-and-take spirit in these negotiations.

In the effort to address social and economic problems and promote development, the African heads of State and Government, at their summit held in Lusaka, Zambia, in July 2001, adopted the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), to place the continent on a path to sustainable growth.

Although the ownership and the implementation of the NEPAD programme is the responsibility of the Africans themselves, in order to succeed they need the cooperation and assistance of the international community. My delegation would like to appeal to the donor community, including United Nations agencies, to assist in the implementation of NEPAD.

My delegation is mindful that Africa's development is hampered by conflicts. Wherever these occur, there is no development; rather, there is more destruction and loss of life and property. Zambia commends the leadership of Africa for taking up the challenge to resolve conflicts in the African way. We thank them for their time and resources directed at that effort. We are happy to note the positive developments that have taken place in the recent past in various parts of Africa where the peace processes have led to the cessation of conflict and the return of peace.

In that regard, my Government reaffirms its readiness to contribute to the international conference on the Great Lakes region initiated by the United Nations in collaboration with the African Union.

The international community should make efforts for conflict prevention and resolution. Conflicts should be avoided by creating a conducive political environment and allow political pluralism, democracy, good governance and transparency to flourish. My country's commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts is unwavering, and we will continue to participate in peacekeeping operations.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is indeed a global crisis. It is no longer just a health concern, but an impediment to human development and political stability, which threatens international peace and security. The startling figures of 42 million people who live with HIV/AIDS globally, the majority of whom are in sub-Saharan Africa, and the 31 million people who have died from the pandemic, should compel the international community to take concrete measures to combat the scourge.

The scourge has ravaged Zambia. My Government is devoting considerable attention and resources to combat its spread and to limit its impact on our communities. We are also tackling the problems created by the pandemic such as the plight of AIDS orphans, street kids and vulnerable households. In this task, Government, civil societies, the relevant United Nations agencies and the private sector are all working together. Zambia is also cooperating with other Governments as well in tackling this pandemic.

The Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which is a welcome initiative, has provided renewed impetus to the programmes and interventions of Member States designed to combat these deadly diseases. There is a need to contribute more generously to the Fund for it to be solvent and viable. My delegation wishes to appeal for easier access to these funds to enable affected countries to procure cheaper and affordable generic drugs that are urgently needed.

My delegation calls for radical reform and strengthening the world body to make it a more efficient and effective instrument to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Zambia supports the Secretary-General's proposals for reform of the United Nations aimed at the strengthening this world body.

In conclusion, I wish to state that my delegation recognizes the numerous challenges that the United Nations faces. I have every hope, that through our collective effort, we will succeed in attaining peace, development and prosperity for all humanity. Zambia pledges her support in these efforts.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Rodolphe Adada, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Francophonie of the Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Adada (Congo) (*spoke in French*): Three years ago, we held the Millennium Summit, during which we crafted a clear-cut common vision for the twenty-first century, a road map to confront the challenges of globalization: peace and security now facing new threats, development and international cooperation, the environment, pandemics and so forth.

One year later the first challenge to this reassuring and ambitious edifice arose, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The international community reacted unanimously and immediately adopted a collective response. A few months later we witnessed the aggravation of tensions with the Iraq crisis, which severely tested the principle of collective security and moral authority of the United Nations, to the point that we doubted the rationale for and the survival of what should be, after all, our common home.

Finally, and most recently, we have witnessed the failure of the Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Cancún. This deadlock in defining a negotiating process to revive the Doha round places in jeopardy the growth prospects of the world economy which would otherwise benefit all people. This can also be interpreted as a new opportunity to marginalize the countries of the South.

All of this shows that this present session is being held in a particularly worrisome context. These developments are dangerous for the management of international affairs that should be marked with a spirit of dialogue, consultation and openness.

We must, therefore, return to the spirit of multilateralism that characterized the Millennium Summit. We must reaffirm, loud and clear, the role of the United Nations as a central axis of collective security and inspiration for the rules of international cooperation aimed at justice and equality.

For this reason it is important to strengthen the role of our Organization and improve its effectiveness. The Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, has now presented a very edifying report in this connection and we very much encourage him to persevere along the path of reform and rationalization and to place the multilateral system at the core of the management of crises and the display of leadership in the world.

Your election, Sir, to the presidency of this session of the General Assembly is, for us, a tremendous asset. It symbolizes the sovereign equality of all States, large and small, and is a way of paying tribute to your great qualities and your diplomatic experience. We are convinced that you will know how to skilfully guide our debate on multilateralism to a satisfying outcome, very much in keeping with the high expectations of the community of nations.

This year, once again we see the challenges to peace and international security at the very core of our major preoccupations. Everyone remembers the attack of 19 August 2003 against the United Nations offices in Baghdad. The death of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, and several dedicated servants of the United Nations, is still alive in our memories.

In paying tribute to their courage and dedication, we must do everything within our power to ensure that their sacrifice was not made in vain and that the cause they served so heroically does indeed triumph in the interests of the Iraqi people and the noble ideas of the United Nations.

We must therefore encourage the Security Council to return to its essential unity so that the international community, led by the moral authority of the United Nations, can help the Iraqi people to find peace, security and stability and reconstruct their country devastated by war and many years of embargo.

Not far from Iraq, the international community is still confronted with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This shows that the infernal cycle of violence can only lead to a dead end. The two parties must come to their senses and return to the vision set out in the road map, which provides for the creation of a Palestinian State that is independent, democratic and viable, living side by side with Israel and its other neighbours in an atmosphere of peace and security.

The Security Council approved this vision in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002) and the two parties committed themselves to respecting the road map on 4 June 2003 at the outcome of the Aqaba Summit. We must now bring them back to the negotiating table, with no pre-conditions, and demand that they refrain from any measure or unilateral action that is incompatible with the goals of the road map.

Still on the subject of peace and security, it seems to be necessary and essential to emphasize that we must refrain from conflating terrorism, religion or civilization as belonging to any geographical area or supporting any national liberation struggle.

Just as we must be firm, demanding and united when confronting acts of unjustifiable blind violence, we must also be vigilant so as not to be tempted by convenience.

In our relentless struggle against terrorism, it is important to give appropriate responses when it comes to the sovereignty of peoples, respect for human rights, social justice and combating poverty. We must also seriously analyse the causes that serve as the breeding ground or pretext for terrorism. This is also part of conflict prevention and, to some extent, the prevention of terrorism.

This year we are celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first special session of the General Assembly on disarmament. It is regrettable to note that, since the end of the cold war, so little progress has been accomplished and today's deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament is a tragic display of our failure.

At a time when the international community is legitimately concerned about weapons of mass destruction that might fall into the hands of terrorists, it is important to remind all of the actors that they must abide by the multilateral agreements and scrupulously respect them.

Within the context of disarmament activities, we welcome the holding, last July in New York, of the first Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the 2001 Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. My country hosted in Brazzaville, from 12 to 14 May 2003, a sub-regional seminar on the implementation in Central Africa of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects and presented at that time a report reflecting Africa's firm determination to eradicate this scourge.

As part of its implementation of the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel landmines, from 9 to 10 September 2003, Congo destroyed its stock of landmines. During two public operations carried out with the support of Canada and the United Nations, our Government destroyed 5,220 landmines. We intend to continue with an operation to search out landmines in the southern part of our country that borders on Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

This is to illustrate the degree of cooperation that prevails among the countries of Central Africa when it comes to questions of peace and security.

Africa is seen today as the focal point for the challenges confronting humanity, in particular as regards armed conflict, underdevelopment and the proliferation of pandemics. But this is not all that Africa has to offer the rest of the world. Various courageous initiatives now show Africa's determination to take its fate into its own hands: the adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the African Peer Review Mechanism and the Council for Peace and Security.

The African Union Summit that was just held in Maputo, Mozambique, eloquently displays this attitude of ours. My delegation associates itself with the statement made on 24 September by His Excellency Mr. Joaquim Alberto Chissano, President of the Republic of Mozambique, on behalf of the African Union. The Acting President clearly informed the international community about the resolve of the African continent to overcome current obstacles to building a new Africa in the areas of peace, security, democracy, human rights, economic development and regional integration.

It is precisely in this spirit that His Excellency Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of Congo, put forward his thoughts in a statement entitled, "For a Pan-African Pact against Aggression".

at the summit in Maputo, which constitutes a contribution to preventive diplomacy that will help to spare the African peoples the horrors of fratricidal strife and enable them to devote themselves exclusively and usefully to development objectives and a code of conduct between African States, lending timely support to the framework outlined by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. My country, which is the current acting President of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CAEMC), takes such concerns to heart as it discharges its mandates in the management of various crises that are shaking our subregion.

We have already had the opportunity to deplore the fact that Central Africa suffers from the paradox of being both one of the richest subregions on the continent and one of the weakest zones in terms of human development indices. All the current initiatives of the leaders of the subregion are geared towards the resolution of this paradox. Thus, during the past year, significant progress had been registered in the various countries that have experienced, or are experiencing, armed crises — Angola, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Congo, the Central African Republic, Burundi and Chad. In the quest to resolve these crises, we have counted on the cooperation of diverse partners, especially the United Nations and African Union.

Allow me to briefly touch on some of the situations that require particular attention from the international community. With respect to Angola, while we welcome the return of peace in that country, ravaged for nearly three decades by civil war, we wish to urge the international community to help the Angolan authorities in their efforts at reconstruction. We continue to support the intention of the Angolan Government to submit for consideration at the present session a draft resolution on international assistance for the reconstruction and economic development of Angola.

We also welcome the positive developments under way in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, distinguished in particular by the establishment of transitional institutions and the deployment of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Ituri. We urge the international community to continue its support for the pacification and reunification process under way in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to further contribute substantively to the reconstruction programmes in place. I would like to reaffirm our steadfast wish to see this neighbouring and brotherly country find peace again, a guarantee for stability of the subregion.

I am also duty-bound to draw the attention of the international community to the situation in the Central African Republic, which has been confronted for years with serious and persistent economic, social and security problems. I would like to recall here that alarmed by this ever-worsening situation, CAEMC has established an ad hoc committee on the Central African Republic, presided over by His Excellency El Hadj Omar Bongo, President of the Gabonese Republic. It has also deployed a peacekeeping force in that country. CAEMC's involvement in the Central African Republic, which has received much encouragement, particularly from the Security Council, mainly aims at the reconciliation of the Central African people, the pacification of the country and the prompt restoration of constitutional order. The holding of a Central African dialogue fits precisely in the framework of the recommended measures.

This country, which has suffered greatly these past years, truly needs assistance from the international community to regain peace, stability, economic growth and democracy. That is the meaning of the appeal made at Brazzaville on 17 May 2003 by the ECCAS Ministers at the meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa.

Still with respect to our subregion, I would like finally to stress in particular the crisis that raged in the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe in July 2003. At that time, ECCAS, the African Union, the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries and Nigeria worked in perfect concert to re-establish the constitutional order shattered in this country on 16 July 2003. While we commend the contribution made by the United States and South Africa, we would like to appeal again for the entire international community to give substantial assistance to the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, particularly to the emergency programme that has just been established by the Government of this country.

We must also follow with great interest developments in Burundi, where every step forward

must be supported and encouraged to make the process irreversible. To that end, the international community is urgently called upon to make good on the financial commitments made during the conferences in Paris and Geneva.

The situations that I have just mentioned lead us to the relevant conclusions of the open Security Council meeting on 22 October 2002 on strengthening cooperation between the United Nations system and the Central African region in the maintenance of peace and security. At that meeting, we expressed our appreciation for the cooperation between our region and the United Nations while welcoming, inter alia, the work of the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. We welcomed the multi-country programme of demobilization and reintegration put forward by the World Bank.

Since then, we welcomed the visit of the Security Council in June 2003 to the Great Lakes region and the multidisciplinary mission of the United Nations system, and we are eagerly awaiting its conclusions.

These conclusions will allow us to meaningfully participate in the future public debates of the Security Council on our subregion, one year after the meeting that elaborated a comprehensive, integrated, determined and concerted approach to the problems of peace, security and development of Central Africa.

Energized by that approach, we intend to participate in the international conference on peace, security, democracy and development in the Great Lakes region. We intend to seize this historic opportunity to exorcise the demons of hatred and violence and lay the foundation for peaceful coexistence among our peoples and nations, which share a common destiny.

While reaffirming the central role that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has to play in that conference, I would like to stress that the Republic of Congo, my country, which is close to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in so many ways, would not understand if it had to attend as an observer at this crucial event. The same goes, by all accounts, for other neighbouring countries of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, such as Angola and the Central African Republic.

The issues of peace, security and building national unity were at the core of the Congolese authorities' concerns during the past year. It is in this framework that the 17 March 2003 agreement must be placed, thanks to which peace continues to reign throughout the entire territory.

Having regained peace, we are seeking to build on it each day, particularly by implementing the programme of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants. We are also working towards the resettlement of internally displaced persons. It is not hard to fathom that these missions require considerable funding, which the Congo cannot provide alone. We would like to thank all our partners for their active solidarity.

We must still meet the great challenges of reconstruction, economy recovery, poverty reduction and the fight against HIV/AIDS, all sectors for which national strategies have been adopted. To implement this vast project, which we have called "The New Hope", we are mobilizing all the national forces capable of providing assistance to the State, including local government authorities, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector. In that framework, we have conducted negotiations with our external partners with a view to benefiting from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative.

All of these achievements can be implemented only in a world free from fear, as envisaged by the founders of our Organization, and as we believe today. This is why we wish to reiterate our faith and attachment to the United Nations, an irreplaceable framework and beacon of all hopes for peace for humanity, and which has never seemed more clearly necessary than today.

The President: I now give the floor to the Honourable Keliopate Tavola, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of the Republic of the Fiji Islands.

Mr. Tavola (Fiji): Mr. President, my Government and country warmly congratulate you on your assumption of the Presidency of this fifty-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly. In presiding over the Assembly, Saint Lucia is setting an historic precedent for small island developing States, with the able support of its Caribbean Community (CARICOM) neighbours.

Fiji fully supports your chairmanship. We also recognize the successful leadership of your

predecessor, President Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic.

I wish to express my Government's deep condolences to the family of Mr. Vieira de Mello and of all the victims of the bombing at the United Nations in Baghdad last month. This was a brutal crime, which robbed the world of one of its most accomplished mediators and peacemakers. We hope that at this session, we can all come together, united, in our collective determination to rid the world of terrorism.

I come from a part of the globe that is isolated in the vast South Pacific. But that remoteness does not separate us from the international perils of the bomb, the gun and the hijacker. It does not insulate us against those bent on causing death and destruction to defend their interests or advance a cause. The fact is that every country and region is a potential target.

Members of the Pacific Islands Forum are joined with the United Nations in the search for a new order of peace and stability. That might seem an impossible task set against the tensions, the hatreds, the bloodshed and violence of the times. But, if we abandon it, we sell out the principles of the United Nations. We betray our countries, our peoples and generations to come.

Are we so inadequate and lacking in our understanding and abilities that we are incapable of coming up with new solutions to stop the spread of terror? It is not enough to simply strike out at the perpetrators. We must spend more effort and resources finding out what turns people towards violence to achieve a goal. We must tell ourselves that there is a different way, that the growing culture of violence and killing is not destined to be a permanent part of our world.

The United Nations needs to go to the root causes of this terrible phenomenon, which casts a very dark and menacing shadow over the first years of the twenty-first century. In the Pacific, we are concentrating on security issues, strengthening law and order and maintaining stability. A number of initiatives were taken during the last 12 months when our Prime Minister served as Forum chair.

Foremost among these initiatives was the ground-breaking decision to send a peace mission to the Solomon Islands in response to a plea for assistance from that country. The Solomon Islands had been wracked for several years by civil unrest, lawlessness and ethnic conflict. We in Fiji had a sympathetic appreciation of the difficulties facing those islands because of our own crisis in 2000. We were more than happy, therefore, to contribute to a task force to the Solomon Islands charged with bringing back order and re-establishing peace. A contingent of our troops, combined with others from Australia, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and New Zealand, is now in the Solomon Islands working with the people there. We are encouraged by what our own soldiers and their comrades have been able to do so far to support a neighbour in distress. Our task is given extra significance through the close ties we enjoy with the Solomon Islands.

The Solomon Islands mission has inevitably generated some controversy and debate about Australia's expanding involvement in our region. But let the record reflect that we endorse Australia's leading role in this intervention on the invitation of the Solomon Islands Government. One of its notable aspects is that it is multilateral. It was accomplished through the Pacific Islands Forum and has the unanimous support of the members. Beyond this, we know that the support and encouragement of the international community and the United Nations system will remain important, as work to build a credible law and justice system, an effective administration and a viable economic base continues.

Recent happenings have brought into question the value, the relevance and the future of multilateralism. Our position is that we understood the concerns, which led the United States to act in the way it did over Iraq. The date of 11 September 2001 was a shattering ordeal. It changed history and it changed America.

That said, Fiji declares an unwavering commitment to the concept of the world community working together, seeking the common path forward. We stand by the ideals of a multilateral, cooperative approach among nations. We welcome the decision by the United States to now seek United Nations involvement in Iraq's reconstruction.

In the Pacific, the Nasonini Declaration on regional security, adopted last year in Fiji, is a keystone of joint strategy. It followed the earlier Honiara Declaration on Law Enforcement Cooperation, aimed at countering transnational and organized crime.

The Forum countries will give higher priority to implementing legislative provisions to improve our

capacity for dealing with law enforcement and security challenges. Underpinning this is an Australian commitment, also approved by the Forum, to spend approximately $15 million over three years, to strengthen regional police forces. New Zealand has, additionally, agreed to put in $2 million. This important project is to be based in Fiji. A regional academy will provide training for about 900 police officers annually from Forum countries.

Fiji has been taking part in United Nations peacekeeping operations since 1978. This has come at a price. But, to us, serving world peace with our soldiers demonstrates that even the smallest States can play their part in minimizing and preventing conflicts. Currently, 635 Fiji personnel are on active duty in United Nations missions, apart from 123 soldiers and 15 police in the Solomon Islands. Our commitment to United Nations peacekeeping has not changed. It is a vital part of our foreign policy.

Fiji stresses the importance of strengthening multilateral treaties and conventions on disarmament and non-proliferation. Our country is one of those that want to see an effective global strategy for the control of small arms and light weapons.

During our Prime Minister's chairmanship of the Pacific Islands Forum, there was a deepening of the South Pacific region's engagement with development partners and international organizations. Heads of Government from member States enhanced their ties with France and Japan. They met in Tahiti with President Chirac and discussed many topics of common concern.

At a summit with Prime Minister Koizumi in Okinawa, they were able to reach and agreement on the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Millennium Development Goals and our own regional priorities, as a further basis for future collaboration.

The Pacific Islands Forum now has 12 dialogue partners, including the United States, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Japan, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, India and Taiwan.

China — the emerging giant in world affairs and trade — has a steadily growing presence in our region. Its involvement and support for our economic and social development is welcome. We see definite scope for trade, investment, cultural and tourism links. China, many commentators believe, already has the world's second largest economy. Its present aid programme is significant and we expect it to grow substantially as bilateral relationships grow stronger.

At the same time, we place great value on our trade and commerce with Taiwan and value its assistance to our development. We look forward to the day when China and Taiwan peacefully resolve their long-standing differences.

We also welcome Japan's role and presence in the Pacific Islands region. Japan is an economic powerhouse and its increased role and contribution in promoting international security and development should be recognized by all Member States in allowing Japan a special place in the United Nations Security Council.

I am pleased to report that in Fiji and the region, there is more coordination in the effort to curb HIV/AIDS, the most terrible disease of our era. Although we have so far escaped the worst effects of HIV/AIDS, it is a real danger in the islands.

We expect to make substantial progress in our fight against this affliction, with support from Japan and France and an allocation from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. A programme financed by Australia provides $12.5 million for the regional campaign. Our Government will also make a larger HIV/AIDS allocation in next year's budget.

HIV/AIDS screening was recently at the centre of discussion in Fiji, when a suggestion was made for obligatory testing. Such a move was regarded by our Human Rights Commission as a rights violation. We must weigh the Commission's views carefully against the competing call for radical response to a national threat.

The Fiji Human Rights Commission is a product of our Constitution and its comprehensive bill of rights. The Commission is implementing a public education campaign to overcome a lack of awareness on rights issues. It also monitors Government and statutory authorities so that laws and policies conform to international human rights principles and the requirements of the Constitution. These generally reflect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by this Assembly in 1948.

As a former colony, Fiji is a late-starter in promoting human rights and civil liberties. Our Government's strategic plan to 2005 expresses very clearly where we stand. The plan was endorsed by a national economic summit and by Parliament. Please allow me to quote briefly from the plan:

> "The guarantee of fundamental rights and freedoms for every citizen of Fiji and their equal protection under the law ... is an essential part of our vision for a peaceful Fiji. A feeling of personal security and of group security comes about when people have confidence that breaches of rights and freedoms will be dealt with impartially and speedily".

I quote further:

> "... Respect for the rights of others is a critical component of our freedoms guaranteed under the constitution. It is essential for peaceful existence in our multi-cultural society".

I emphasize these points because sometimes there are attempts to depict Fiji as a land where rights are habitually abused. Propaganda against our country has been circulated in some quarters here at the United Nations.

Much of this stems from opposition to our affirmative action policies designed to end social and economic inequalities. These are based on principles well-established internationally and are provided for in our Constitution.

It is self-evident that a country cannot grow in justice, harmony and prosperity when more than half of its population — in this case the indigenous Fijians — are largely outside the economy looking in.

All right-thinking people will agree that it is just and fair that this should be changed. But we constantly stress that this is not about taking from one group to give to another. It is about making the economy grow so that there is enough wealth to be shared equitably among our population. We want to give the Fijians a chance to catch up and compete in business and commerce.

Let it be noted that we have brought in laws to help the disadvantaged of all communities. This is a constitutional obligation. No one is being left out. That is the commitment we have made to our own population, and we now make to the international community.

Disparities and inequalities go to the very heart of the dispute which brought about the collapse of the Cancún talks. The failure of the talks underscores the deep differences which separate the poor countries from the rich in the battle to reform international trade. We acknowledge the ideal of free trade, but the stark reality is that there are many dangerous pitfalls for nations whose economies are weak and vulnerable.

It will be a long time before most developing States are ready to compete on that so-called level playing field. To them it is not level at all. Bring the barriers down completely and the full might of first-world commercial power will descend. What will that do to home-grown and emerging industries in poorer countries?

For the time being, countries like ours need preferences and special access for our economic survival. Think of it as a form of affirmative action to reduce that yawning chasm between the rich North and the poverty-stricken South. We now need to urgently consider where the World Trade Organization goes from here, and what can be done to salvage the wreckage of Cancún.

About three and-a-half years ago, my country came very close to anarchy. We had an armed insurrection, hostage-taking and violence. The Government of the day was overthrown. It was a time of extreme crisis for Fiji.

Now, I can stand before this Assembly to tell you that our nation is being reborn. Order and stability were restored and the first steps taken on a continuing journey of reconciliation. We had peaceful, democratic elections. Our Government is on a mission to build a Fiji where peace, multi-racial harmony and prosperity will always reign.

Our economic policy is to create more employment and wealth through high growth. We have increased Government investment in infrastructure and made a concerted and, to this point, successful effort to attract greater volumes of private capital. Many of the indicators are positive — apart from those relating to our sugar industry. This year, we expect to achieve an overall growth rate of more than five per cent.

This remarkable recovery could not have been achieved without the encouragement and support of

many friends of Fiji in the international community, and especially here at the United Nations.

I pay tribute to the role of the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Labour Organization. The ILO is making a particularly valuable contribution at the moment with a plan to accelerate job creation.

To conclude, the "special case" of the small island developing States is calling for a "special response" of the global community, in further advancing our sustainable development efforts. The ten-year comprehensive review of the Barbados Programme of Action in Mauritius next year will provide the avenue for our development partners to make further commitments to our cause. Fiji is urging the international community to contribute to the success of this meeting.

Mr. President and fellow delegates, the United Nations is currently experiencing considerable strain and division, but it is for all of us to ensure that this Organization comes through the period of difficulty, strengthened and regenerated. The world needs the United Nations and what it stands for.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Abdi Hashi, chairman of the delegation of the Somali Republic.

Mr. Hashi (Somalia): Allow me first of all to sincerely congratulate Mr. Julian Hunte on his election as President of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. Your election to the presidency is a reflection of the high esteem the international community reserves for your country, Saint Lucia, and your good person.

At the same time, I would like to express our appreciation for the excellent manner in which your predecessor conducted the work of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

I would be remiss if I did not pay tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Anan for his strong commitment to the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and for defending so courageously the ideals on which this Organization is based.

The destruction of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, with its unnecessary loss of life, was a heinous crime against humanity and the United Nations. Sergio Vieira de Mello and his United Nations co-workers were in Iraq not as an occupying Power, but to serve and address the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. This despicable act is tantamount to cutting off the hand that feeds. We offer our sincere and profound condolences to Secretary-General Kofi Anan, the United Nations family and the bereaved families. In memory of the fallen, it is imperative for us, Member States, to accelerate ratification of the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

The recent high-level meeting at United Nations Headquarters on the HIV/AIDS pandemic was of tremendous interest to the world and particularly to many countries in Africa. The AIDS scourge, having devastated entire communities, has also negatively impacted the economic development of countries. In order to combat this scourge, it is incumbent upon the international community to make more resources available, even in those countries where the incidence of the pandemic is reportedly low.

My country, Somalia, is reported to be one of those countries in Africa with a very low rate of infection. However, this should not lead us into complacency. Countries like Somalia have a unique chance to prevent the disease from spreading. An AIDS epidemic would be catastrophic for Somalia and seriously hamper efforts for peace and nation-building. It is therefore critical to put into place coordinated and strategic AIDS education and early response programmes to prevent the spread of the epidemic in Somalia. As the saying goes, prevention is better than cure.

Recent developments in the international arena present the United Nations with unprecedented challenges. Whether we succeed or fail will depend primarily on the manner in which we address these challenges. In our view, that should be through the United Nations. We have to reinforce the principles of the United Nations Charter through which we can further cement the pillars of international legitimacy on the basis of the equality of nations big and small, rich and poor, respect for the sovereignty of peoples, non-interference in each others' internal affairs, renunciation of the use of force in resolving conflicts, and respect for human rights.

There are Members of this Organization who violate these lofty principles with impunity. Israel is an example in this regard. Israel's continued occupation of Arab lands seized by war; its denying the Palestinian people their dignity; the daily killings of Palestinian children; the siege of the legitimate leader of the Palestinian people and calls by Israeli officials for his killing; and the suffering and daily humiliations inflicted on the Palestinian people are of great concern to the international community. We believe that these gross violations of international law are not in the interest of Israel or peace in the Middle East. We believe that the Arab initiative, which has the support of Arab States, provides a unique opportunity for achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and specifically between Arabs and Israelis.

The situation in Iraq continues to be of great concern. The people of Iraq need peace and development. The people of Iraq need to recuperate from the trauma of war and its aftermath. As a country that has witnessed war and its destruction, we know what the Iraqi people are going through. We empathize with them strongly. There must be a commitment from the international community to respecting the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq. The withdrawal of the occupying forces from Iraq as soon as possible and the establishment of a truly representative Government for Iraq based on a constitution acceptable to all Iraqis continue to be imperatives. In this regard, the United Nations can and must play the central role in bringing peace to Iraq.

A fresh wind is blowing throughout Africa, from the West of the continent to its Eastern and Central regions. This fresh wind is one of hope and peace not only for Africa, but also for the world. This wind of hope and peace needs to be nurtured and sustained by the international community.

We welcome the progress made in the search for peace in African countries — the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau. The latest and most welcome progress towards peace is the 22 September 2003 agreement signed in Naivasha, Kenya, by the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Sudan People's Liberation Army. We encourage the parties to resolve the remaining outstanding issues in a spirit of accommodation and mutual understanding. We also commend the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union, the United Nations and individual countries for their valuable assistance in bringing peace to areas of conflict in Africa.

I pause to share with the General Assembly the situation in my country, Somalia. We express our deep gratitude to the Government and people of Kenya for hosting us and for their perseverance. We strongly commend Kenya for its active role in promoting peace in Somalia. I also take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his valuable support for the peace process in Somalia. The IGAD Partners Forum, the African Union, the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and IGAD are to be commended for their firm commitment and input into this process.

The Somali National Reconciliation Conference at Mbagathi enters its twelfth month. A lot of ground has been covered during this period. A declaration on the cessation of hostilities has been adopted and the African Union has put in place a monitoring mechanism. Today, African Union monitors crisscross nearly all areas of Somalia to ensure the implementation of the declaration on the cessation of hostilities.

Equally important is the completion of the first two phases of the Conference. Despite such progress, we have been struggling with the last and crucial phase of the Conference for the past four months. This last phase envisaged the adoption of an interim charter, to be followed by the election of an interim head of State and the formation of an all-inclusive Government of Somalia. However, disagreements regarding the content of the interim charter and other important matters continue to persist. The provisions of the interim charter that raise the concerns of many touch upon the shape and very foundations of the reconstituted State of Somalia. It is for that reason that the Conference is currently in suspense and stalled, with the Transitional National Government and at least seven other groups refraining from participation.

Any interim charter for Somalia, in our view, must meet certain, basic criteria. First, it must have Somali ownership. Secondly, it must be the result of a fair and transparent process. Thirdly, it must have the support of the Somali stakeholders. Fourthly, it must be enforceable on the ground. Fifthly, it must reflect the

unity and indivisibility of the Somali nation. Finally, any Government that is established under this interim Charter should be an all-inclusive one. By the same token, any agreements reached in Kenya must be on a consensus basis, have the support of the Somalis as well as of the international community, and be enforceable on the ground.

To facilitate an agreement based on these criteria, a re-evaluation of the manner in which the Conference is currently being run is called for. The IGAD frontline States must observe the principle of impartiality and neutrality, without which no mediation can be taken seriously. Furthermore, the IGAD frontline States must confine their role to that of an active facilitator and attempts to fast-track the process with a view to reaching any agreement in haste and at any price must be discouraged.

In spite of the current difficulties, I am here to reiterate before this Assembly the sincere commitment of the Transitional National Government to the IGAD-led peace process for Somalia. I hereby state that the Transitional National Government will rejoin the peace conference in Mbagathi, Kenya, as soon as its concerns are fairly addressed. We do this not only for ourselves, but also for the Somali people, who have suffered so long. I submit that the solution lies in assisting the Somali parties to come to an agreement that is owned by all Somalis, rather than in imposing something against their will. We urge the international community to engage itself in the realization of this goal. We must all work together to ensure that the march to peace in Somalia is irreversible.

The international community has an obligation to re-engage in Somalia in a very serious manner and to re-enforce its role as a promoter of peace there at the Security Council and other levels, as it has done with other conflict areas in Africa. It is not enough to observe or to wait and see. Somalia needs serious sponsorship to push the peace forward. Finally, we urge the neighbouring countries of Somalia to scrupulously comply with the arms embargo imposed on Somalia by the Security Council. We strongly urge them to do so in the interest of peace and security in the subregion.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alfredo Cabral, chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

Mr. Cabral (Guinea-Bissau) (*spoke in French*): You have assumed the presidency of the General Assembly, Sir, at a particularly critical time, when the applicability of rules, the reliability of mechanisms and even the authority of institutions have been called into question. We are now living through a period of uncertainty and questioning — uncertainty regarding the validity of certain fundamental principles that have been taken for granted and questions about the path to follow and the actions to be taken. Against such a difficult backdrop and at a time that is, to say the least, unpredictable, it is encouraging to know that we can count on your experience and myriad talents to guide our work. Guinea-Bissau is gratified by your election and congratulates you most warmly.

Our programme of work is a heavy one because once again we have been unable to draft an agenda that is more streamlined and less repetitive. As in the past, we will therefore be confronted by claims that are all equally legitimate; unfortunately, however, as always, rancour will occasionally raise its head. This demonstrates the extent to which you, Sir, will require the contribution of each and every one of us in order successfully to complete your mission. In this respect, I note with satisfaction that all delegations that have preceded us at this rostrum have assured you of their full support. You may rely on the full cooperation of the delegation of Guinea-Bissau. This is all the more true since you have established your mandate under the sign of action, for it is clear that it is indeed vigorous action that we shall need to convince those who today doubt the ability of the United Nations to meet their expectations.

We need resolute action to ensure respect for the principles and implementation of the objectives of the Charter. We need collective action to strengthen the United Nations capacity to resolve such urgent issues as poverty and hunger throughout the world, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the right to full enjoyment of human rights, control of weapons of mass destruction, and the deterioration of the environment, our most precious heritage, to name but a few. We need concerted, multilateral and vigorous action against terrorism and all those practices, finance, instigate or are involved in it and commit such cowardly and dastardly crimes as the attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. We also need action to promote the adoption of urgent measures to guarantee the security of the Organization's personnel.

We need urgent and consistent action, too, designed to extinguish hotbeds of tension, resolve

I wish here and now to congratulate the Secretary-General on his leadership and dedication to the cause of peace and to hail the dignity, compassion and humanism that he demonstrated in the face of such a tragic ordeal as the brutal, wrongful and unforeseen deaths of colleagues and personal friends.

The United Nations, for the first time in a long while, has been bypassed — indeed, forced to take a back seat — in the management of a crisis, the nature and gravity of which required it to play its due role therein. Beyond the differences that emerged within the international community, and in particular among the members of the Security Council, regarding the right way to deal with an outlaw, recidivist and dangerous regime, the issue of Iraq once again highlighted the limitations of an Organization that, while universal, nevertheless depends on a small number of its Members. That is one of the reasons behind the many frustrations voiced year after year from this rostrum.

Our continent, Africa, still faces difficulties of all kinds. Poverty and endemic malnutrition are compounded by the agonies of HIV/AIDS, which continues to kill millions of individuals. There is also the growing number of conflicts and the proliferation of small arms, which pose an ongoing threat to the peace and stability of the countries of our continent.

This unfortunate picture is particularly accurate for West Africa, where several armed conflicts have erupted in recent years, with Liberia as their epicentre. Everyone is now aware of what some of us, the Republic of Guinea in particular, have been saying for years. The civil war in Liberia is contagious and the trigger of a series of crises and armed conflicts in the subregion. It has now touched countries that were once held up as examples of political stability and economic growth and were believed to be immune to such disasters.

My delegation should like to welcome the progress recently made in Liberia. The people of that country deserve finally to live in peace. It is a people that, as we all know, has suffered greatly from many years of war and destruction. We were also totally shocked to see all those children being used as cannon fodder in a war that was unjustified and unjustifiable. We also note with satisfaction the progress made in Sierra Leone. There, too, it was high time for peace to be restored. We are also pleased that our friends in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have finally

committed themselves on the path to progress and national reconciliation.

My country, Guinea-Bissau, has undergone some changes, the nature of which and the methods used to effect them have been subject to criticism, running the gamut from simple regret to formal condemnation. These are positions of principle that we understand and accept, for we have never ceased to proclaim our devotion to democracy and the rule of law. I recall here that my country was one of the first in Africa to wage an exemplary liberation struggle on behalf of freedom, human rights and democracy.

However, the sad realities of life, particularly when they are characterized by chronic and dangerous constitutional instability, can unfortunately lead to the overthrow of an existing regime specifically to prevent the exacerbation of social and political tensions in the country that could lead to confrontation or even civil war.

In Guinea-Bissau, a military committee decided to reflect in action the hopes for change of the majority of the population. Not a single shot was fired. No one in Guinea-Bissau has been arrested and I welcome the fact that the military has rejected any consideration of exercising power. In such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the people have adhered to this movement, which has effected the changes they desired. Indeed, the people's support was total.

The members of the military committee for the restitution of the constitutional and democratic order were in fact acclaimed as genuine liberators. In Guinea-Bissau, we had been in an untenable situation. Our people, whose courage and dignity cannot be overemphasized, had had enough. They had reached the limit of what one can decently ask someone to put up with. I cannot sufficiently reiterate the extent to which our people deserve to be encouraged, supported and assisted.

Now that we have decided to turn the page, to look towards the future and to determine how we, the citizens of Guinea-Bissau, can be reconciled, unite our forces, create synergy and act together for the well-being of our people, the international community should intercede on our behalf and to provide the financial assistance we need. It is indeed financial assistance that we need, because our country and our State are destitute. We need international assistance to recover, to meet our challenges and to ensure that our people can eat. We need to see to it that those who chose freedom some 10 years ago can finally see it flourish, enjoy its benefits and understand why they fought and why they have a right to a decent and better life.

I should like to say here that, right now in our country, a process is under way that is bringing together all the vital forces of our nation. The political parties, the military committee and civil society — everyone has come together to meet the challenge as one and to answer the call of the people to join forces and work together. As I speak before this Assembly, the membership of the Government is under discussion. Thanks to concerted action and a professional and intensive analysis of the situation in our country, we have been able to adopt an interim charter that specifies all the stages required to restore as soon as possible the constitutional and democratic order that we and the international community wish to see return to Guinea-Bissau.

An Interim President has been chosen by consensus. This President is dedicated to working for the unity of the country. He intends to strengthen national unity and to serve as a catalyst so that we can return to our ideal of progress and freedom.

In conclusion, I should like to thank our brothers and sisters of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) subregion, who have striven to help us get back on our feet, discuss and find the most appropriate solutions to our problems. I thank first of all the Heads of State of Ghana, Senegal and Nigeria, who have visited Guinea-Bissau, as well as the ECOWAS ministers, who have never failed to support Guinea-Bissau. I also wish to note the assistance provided to us by the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, which dispatched the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Timor-Leste to advise us and to voice the solidarity of that linguistic community, to which we belong.

A country's national unity is its most precious asset. I cannot overemphasize that fact and I hope that I shall soon see democracy fully restored in my country. Above all, however, I wish to see the people of Guinea-Bissau happy. It is a proud and dignified people that has suffered in silence — a most eloquent silence — and that deserves the trust and assistance of the international community.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Martin Belinga-Eboutou, chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Cameroon.

Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. You have set in motion a cycle of African presidencies of the Assembly — today, the African diaspora, tomorrow the African motherland. Your election attests to the high esteem in which the Member States hold your country, Saint Lucia, a traditional partner of Cameroon in the great African, Caribbean and Pacific family. It is also testimony to the trust that the representatives of those States place in you and your eminent diplomatic qualities. You may rest assured that my delegation will cooperate fully with you, as we have the pleasure of being a member of your Bureau in our capacity as Chairman of the Third Committee. Allow me to extend my wishes of success to the other members of the Bureau.

I also take this opportunity to commend your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, for the skill with which he guided our work at the last session.

To Secretary-General Kofi Annan, I wish to reiterate, in the context of the current international scene, Cameroon's expression of great pride and trust in him and his role as a facilitator in the settlement of inter-African conflicts. I thank him for his energetic and tireless activity in the service of the great ideals of the Organization.

Our Organization was created to preserve future generations from the scourge of war, to create conditions in which all can enjoy dignified lives, and to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The United Nations was created to ensure the reign of peace at the service of humankind. As Pope John XXIII recalled in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, which was addressed to all men of good will and the fortieth anniversary of which we celebrate this year, that peace rests on four indispensable conditions corresponding to four specific necessities of the human spirit: truth, justice, charity and liberty. Our heads of State trod the same path at the Millennium Summit. They undertook to free humankind from warfare and poverty, to promote human rights and to strengthen the United Nations. We felt that it would be useful to recall those principles because the picture of the world that has emerged in this general debate since 23 September is not a very optimistic one.

On 19 August, the United Nations was struck by tragedy. The terrorist attack that destroyed the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad and struck and killed dozens of innocent victims, including Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, posed a great challenge to the principles and values that are the bedrock of our Organization. At the time, President Paul Biya expressed on behalf of Cameroon expressed his profound indignation and firmly condemned that odious, criminal act. Tomorrow, we will weep with the people of Iraq for the tragic death — again in Baghdad — of Akila Al-Hashemi, a highly talented diplomat and eminent member of the Iraqi Governing Council.

Cameroon is proud that our Organization did not shirk its responsibilities or even weaken in its resolve to play a central role in the stabilization, orderly restoration of the sovereignty and reconstruction of Iraq and to support the political process under way. Following upon the long series of terrorist acts committed throughout the world since the tragedy of 11 September 2001, the 19 August attack in Baghdad was a timely reminder of the vulnerability of our world today. The complexity of the challenge and the gravity of the danger require us to step up our collective efforts effectively to confront terrorism, which today poses perhaps the most serious threat to international peace and security. Cameroon again calls for a high-level conference to be convened to define a collective organized response by the international community to terrorism.

In addition to new threats to international peace and security, such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, there are other, equally dangerous, threats: all sorts of pandemics, including HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, and despair stemming from almost endemic poverty.

Therefore, our joint mobilization should be aimed primarily at reducing or even eliminating the germs and causes of conflicts and despair.

In the Middle East, we must demand that the parties to the conflict — Israel and Palestine — return without delay to the negotiating table to agree on modalities conducive to the rapid and comprehensive implementation of the road map. Cameroon regrets and condemns the escalation of violence, which is seriously

endangering any peaceful solution based on the letter and spirit of Security Council resolution 1397 (2002), adopted with no vote against. In it the Council affirmed

> "the vision of a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized borders".

Our Palestinian and Israeli friends must get used to the idea that they are condemned to live side by side, to coexist in the geopolitical configuration forged by their rich, common history. To that end, Israelis and Palestinians will have to disarm — of course, in terms of weapon policies, but primarily disarm at the cultural level by unanimously and sincerely ridding their hearts of fear and the psychosis of war. The axiom that peace results from a balance of war-making ability and weapons should be replaced by the principle that real peace can be built only on mutual trust.

The same applies to the peoples of the renowned Mesopotamia, who are emerging from three decades of tyranny, and must very soon, with the help of the international community, have their full dignity and sovereignty restored in a stable and prosperous Iraq, living in peace with all its neighbours.

Over the past year, the many conflicts that have bloodied Africa have remained at the centre of the concerns of the United Nations, which has made many efforts to end them. Fortunately, those efforts are beginning to yield results. Some African conflicts are on the way to being resolved, nourishing new and legitimate hopes. Unfortunately, despite everything, there are still deplorable situations where the protagonists are having trouble finding a negotiated political solution or keeping their commitments. We are convinced that there will soon be results, given genuine political will on the part of the major actors. The irreplaceable support they receive from the United Nations deserves to be welcomed and recognized.

Africa in general and our subregion in particular are fully aware of the role this important partner plays in our economic development, in consolidating democracy and the rule of law, and, finally, in promoting peace and security within and outside our countries. That is why the member States of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) have forcefully expressed their desire to strengthen their cooperation with the United Nations through a political presence of that Organization in the subregion, which would bolster our subregional capacities, particularly in the area of peace and security.

In that connection, Cameroon reiterates its thanks to the Secretary-General for sending a multidisciplinary mission to Central Africa last June at the request of the members of the Security Council. We await with interest its innovative recommendations, which will shortly be made to the Security Council. They will nourish the debate to be held in this Hall on the agenda item entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Economic Community of Central African States".

We welcome the Secretary-General's suggestions concerning the functioning of the Organization in this constantly changing world. We will fully support any reform that will bring the Organization closer to our peoples, as envisaged by the measures for strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and Central African organizations.

In the Millennium Declaration, the political leaders of the world committed themselves to creating a world partnership for development and to respond to the special needs of Africa. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), whereby Africa has decided to take back the initiative and to control its own fate, can serve as a sound platform for a fruitful partnership between the continent and the international community.

Africa is waiting for multiple responses. One, which will play a decisive part in the growth of our continent, is linked to trade. What African States want and aspire to is to play a more important part in the trade of goods and services. That implies in particular standards favouring fair competition.

The failure of the recent World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference held at Cancun has raised grave doubts, particularly among African countries that export agricultural products. The tremendous reluctance of wealthy nations to dismantle their agricultural subsidy regimes is puzzling, and seriously threatens the survival of African economies based on agriculture and livestock. The subsidies given to that sector are stifling millions of farmers and cotton producers in Central and West Africa.

In the same context, Mr. President, your country, Saint Lucia, and Cameroon have been carrying out an epic battle for almost a decade for the survival of our

banana industries, which are up against the giants of the sector.

There are many more examples of the need for solidarity and urgent reform of the multilateral economic system. We hope that the Doha round will not deviate from its main objective — development — and that it will take well into consideration the concerns of the poorest in order to integrate them promptly into the global economy.

Globalization does not relate only to trade. It also affects human development and new technologies, the protection of the ecosystem and the sustainable development of water and other natural resources. All of those aspects require a concerted approach, given that the sacrifices of some work to everyone's advantage. Cameroon, which has chosen, for example, to participate in rational and sustainable management of the world forest ecosystem, has established a bold national environmental management plan.

It is clear that, in order to effectively implement such policies without exposing its rural populations to extreme poverty, our country needs significant financial assistance, particularly to diversify its production and to ensure systematic transformation of its natural resources. In other words, today, more than ever before, solidarity should rhyme with partnership — and globalization with fair trade — to ensure the comprehensive and orderly development of our world.

The United Nations assuredly remains the only universal Organization that not only possesses the necessary competencies and impartiality, but is also the only entity that can confer legitimacy on any multilateral action tackling the great world challenges, a number of which we have just listed. To attain these noble objectives, it urgently needs to consider in depth its current approaches, the way it operates and its implementing mechanisms.

Cameroon unreservedly supports the Secretary-General's initiative to establish a high-level panel of eminent personalities to consider ways to strengthen the United Nations. We hopefully await their contribution to the Organization's necessary and unavoidable reform to improve its performance, including its missions of an economic and social nature as well as international peace and security.

The Secretary-General invites us to go further along the path of reform, to which he has been committed for several years. He is right. What is at stake is the Organization's very effectiveness, which it needs to tackle the great challenges of our time. He can count on Cameroon's support.

As I have been concluding my remarks, the light has changed from green to yellow and from yellow to red. How can one refrain from prolonging his comments when it is a question of humanity and humanity's future through peace, a negotiated peace, a concerted peace, a peace that rests on justice and the equitable distribution of benefits and wealth?

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmad Chalabi, chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Iraq.

Mr. Chalabi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today I stand before the Assembly representing the voice of the Iraqi citizen who long suffered from cruelty within and outside his homeland. Those within his country inflicted on him the worst kinds of torture: they attacked his honour, assaulted his family, humiliated him, shackled him, oppressed him and forced him into miserable wars. His brothers and his friends in the region not only remained silent, ignored him and turned a blind eye to his catastrophe, they also criticized and faulted him the moment he dared to speak up. And throughout the world, those who stood to benefit scrambled to do business and cooperate with his torturer.

Very few accepted and spoke the truth, very few considered the catastrophe of their fellow human being and declared that he was a victim. He heard no response to his appeals. So the Iraqi citizen remained lost and doubly persecuted — first, with the injustice of the sword with which the dictatorial regime attacked him at home, and then with the injustice of criticism — a more painful affliction — from many abroad. But the Iraqi citizen did not give up. Rather, he was persistent and patient, and he continued his struggle through his thoughts, words and actions to achieve liberation, the ideal for which he had always yearned most.

I stand today before the Assembly expressing to Members to the best of my ability the voice of this Iraqi individual, declaring with him and on his behalf the end of silence. I ask each Member present here to listen to him.

I come today to present the Assembly with four essential truths and to demonstrate, through those truths, two fundamental rights.

The first truth is that Iraq's long, dark night has ended. The bitter experience of humiliation, oppression, suppression, and dictatorship that the Iraqis endured for more than three decades has ended. It ended with the fleeing of the head of the regime, along with his cronies, and with the collapse of the symbols that he had erected in Baghdad and throughout Iraq.

The second truth is that the liberation of Iraq — and what took place was indeed liberation — could not have been achieved had it not been for the resolve of President George W. Bush and the commitment of the coalition, headed by the United States of America and the United Kingdom. The Iraqis will never forget their sacrifices and the courage they displayed in Iraq's liberation. If today we hear the voices of those who question the intentions of the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom in undertaking the liberation, we invite them to come to visit the mass graves, the drained marshes and the gassed city of Halabja, and to examine the list of the missing whose right to life was taken from them by the regime.

The third truth is that the liberation embodied a universal Iraqi national resolve. The liberation came as a result of vigorous Iraqi efforts to oppose the deposed regime during many long years when hundreds of thousands of martyrs were sacrificed. The martyr Ayatollah Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim and his companions — may God rest their souls — were not the last victims; they added another page to the annals of Iraqi bravery on 29 August, the day of the Iraqi martyr. Nor was death by treachery spared the martyr Akila al-Hashemi.

The fourth truth is that the removal of the regime was only the prelude to the birth of a new Iraq. The birth that has been prepared for by so many faithful Iraqis, both at home and abroad, is at hand.

A unique experience awaits us in Iraq today. We will succeed through our desire to do good, to achieve development and to let freedom spread and flourish. I stand here today to confirm that, with God's help, we in Iraq will accept nothing short of success. Iraqis are capable of succeeding, and they want to succeed. We will not allow a gang of mercenaries and terrorists to deprive the Iraqi citizen, the Iraqi society and the Iraqi nation of a bright tomorrow.

The land of the two rivers, the cradle of civilization, the land of Sumer, Akkad, Babylon and Assyria, the land of peace, the land of the caliphate and the house of wisdom, the home of the Code of Hammurabi and the storehouse of accumulated knowledge, literature, poetry and intellectual achievement is dependent, first and foremost, on its human resources more than on its natural and oil resources.

On the basis of its human resources, Iraq can undergo a qualitative sea change, moving it from the grip of totalitarianism and fear to stability, prosperity and tolerance. What the international community puts into Iraq will be returned many times over. Put your confidence in Iraq and receive from it stability and prosperity. Not only would stability and prosperity be Iraq's but they would spread to the rest of the region and the entire world.

The Iraq that we want to see is the Iraq of the innovative individual. More than 60 per cent of Iraq's population is below the age of 20. Our first priority in preparing those young people for the twenty-first century is to give them cultural and educational values that will enable each of them to prove themselves and their particularities in a new Iraq.

In the past in Iraq, as in other nations that suffered under the ideologies of the twentieth century, the individual was suppressed by the masses, the masses by the revolution, the revolution by the party, and the party by the leader. The result was that the human being was lost under continuous layers of negation that obliterated his individuality, making him an object for consumption in an ostensible defence of the nation and in the name of the revolution, or to be sacrificed, body and soul, for the leader. The concerns of Iraqis are no different from those of all other peoples of the world. Iraqis are eager to define themselves and to project their singularity. The Iraq of tomorrow must recognize the individual citizen as the basis of sovereignty and the starting point for legislation.

The rights of the individual are fundamental; the rights of the group derive from them. Iraqis, like other peoples, insist on their right to dignity, freedom, justice and peace. The assertion of such rights will build the foundations of tomorrow's Iraq. The dignity of every Iraqi, without exception, must be guaranteed, without consideration for social status, political position or economic situation. An accused person will not lose his

dignity, even if found guilty. We will begin with dignity because the previous regime worked futilely to convince Iraqis that their dignity was an endowment from the ruler. Today, we stress that the dignity of the entire nation stems from the dignity of each citizen.

As with dignity, so with freedom. Freedom is not a gift from the rulers or the State. Rather, it is a basic principle, the essence of a human being. Responsible freedom that does not impinge upon the liberties of others is the core of the social contract. Despite the excesses of outsiders and infiltrators since the fall of the repressive regime, Iraqis have proved to themselves that freedom means neither chaos nor the law of the jungle.

The individual has an instinct for freedom, and thus he demands justice. The previous regime undermined justice and transformed it into a tool of the State to oppress and suppress the people. The new Iraq will be based on a firm justice system that ensures the independence and integrity of the judiciary. After the senseless wars that destroyed innumerable lives, leaving disaster in their wake, the new Iraq will adopt a new defensive policy based on peace. Iraq will be an activist for peace for the region and the world. The aforementioned four truths will form the foundation of Iraq's political future.

Iraq will abide strictly and explicitly by all human rights instruments, beginning with the Declaration of Human Rights, guaranteeing the right of man to life, property and the pursuit of happiness.

We pledge that Iraqi laws and legislation apply equally to all the people. No person will be above the law for any reason, regardless of merit or individual responsibility. Indeed, there will be no distinction on the basis of religion, sect, race, language, ethnicity, gender, class or tribe. The defunct regime exploited those divisions for its own ends. The new Iraq will rely on justice and fairness.

Iraqi women are capable of innovative excellence and productivity and can take on all the responsibilities of the nation. It is the duty of society and the State to remove any obstacles in their way.

The constant dialogue that is required between Iraqi citizens and the State that represents and serves them will take place on the basis of an honest, democratic and representational system. This system is based on the principle of the separation of powers, and firmly upholds elections as the ultimate arbiter. We are not concerned with the dressings of democracy, but with the safety of the political system as the incarnation of the democratic spirit.

The pillars of this system are, first and foremost, the separation of powers in the framework of a written constitution that avoids duplication in the judicial, legislative and executive powers. That will provide a sound basis for each to oversee the other. Secondly, accountability will be ensured as a result of such supervision and by means of elections that will provide for the participation of individuals in politics. Finally, civil society will be empowered by means of a free press, unions and independent institutions, which will act as monitors and critics and represent the plurality of political forces in the country.

The third pillar is the upholding of transparency as a fundamental principle, based on the sovereignty of the individual citizen. The State exists to serve, and is answerable to the citizen, who is entitled to inquire into its affairs. The State does not have the right to withhold information on its affairs. The fourth pillar is recognition by the minority of the right of the majority to assume power, and the respect by the majority of the rights of the minority. Here, it is important to distinguish between a political majority and minority and a factional majority and minority. Political majorities and minorities are determined by the ballot box, not by a population census or random correlations. No one has the authority to arrogate to himself a political right on the basis of a presumed factional majority. We do not want a political, sectarian or national allocation in Iraq. A sound representative, federal political system can best express the interests of all Iraqi citizens in a manner that reflects their religion, creed, ethnicity or language.

The previous period was characterized by restricting all power to an abusive few in Baghdad, but tomorrow's Iraq will be based on the principle of local authority in the context of a federal union. Federalism as construed by Iraqis is not based on the division of the homeland; rather, it is a way of empowering and rehabilitating those living in different regions to take direct responsibility for their affairs in their own regions, without constant interference from the central Government.

Our constitution charts the relationship between integrated and continuous local and national

authorities. We rely on the federal system, as we do on the democratic system, because we have a clear understanding of the relationship between the State and its citizens. This relationship is not one of guardianship, because the Iraqi citizen is not a minor and is therefore not in need of the State's interference in all his affairs. Our concern is to ensure that this relationship is based on care, with the State being the vigilant servant of the citizen, and on nurturing in some areas, especially with regard to the provision of education and social and health services for young people.

Complementing our belief in federalism, and in contrast with the vain and false nationalist excesses of the previous regime, we declare that Iraq is one nation, permanent and whole.

Nothing in this declaration belittles the continuity of our Arab and Muslim heritage, or contradicts the sentiments of many Iraqis about their own culture and national identity. Rather, it confirms that all the territory of Iraq — from its mountains in the far north to its marshes and the Gulf in the extreme south, including its rivers, plains and deserts — is a lasting, indivisible unit. This is an expression not only of the true beliefs of most Iraqis, but also of a key political principle and point of reference that will help the country recognize realities on the ground and avoid further upheaval.

While we seek to strengthen the rule of law and institutions of governance, we wish to make clear that authority emanates from the citizen who occupies the political position not from the political post itself. There must be a legal foundation in this respect, and decisions must not be taken because of the whims or opinions of a person in authority. The previous regime issued many arbitrary rules, regulations and decisions based on one man's views. The alternative in tomorrow's Iraq will be the application of the rule of law through sanctioned legislative authority that reflects the will of the Iraqi people, through an independent judiciary and under the supervision of an elected legal body.

Last but not least, let me touch on the relationship between religion and State in the new Iraq. Islam is the religion of the overwhelming majority of Iraqis. It is vital to the Iraqi identity as well as to the State and the nature of governance. In any case, the great civilizational heritage and rich cultural repository of Islamic jurisprudence is, no doubt, one of Iraq's assets, and we will benefit from it through a judiciary that is based on equality and pluralism.

Let me point out a truth that is often overlooked: that the State, during the previous century, used religion for its own ends and took from it what suited those who had usurped power. They rejected the independence of institutions and of religious centres, taking over the Awqaf and imposing a religious terminology that suited their own interests, at the expense of those of others. In Iraq, religion is one of the most important assets of the individual and of society. We will not abandon it in any area, or reject its judicial, intellectual, behavioural or daily implications. We call for the rehabilitation of all religious institutions by enabling them to reassume their responsibilities in protecting Iraqi citizens who seek their moral and spiritual guidance without hypocritical political involvement.

These are the main guidelines for what we want for our country.

Our right today is to demand help and assistance from the world, thanking all those who stood by the Iraqis in their darkest hour and forgiving those who inadvertently did not stand with us. It is important for all nations of the world to acknowledge that what happened in Iraq — past atrocities and today's reconstruction — reflects an ongoing and dramatic historical event. The international community must stand shoulder to shoulder with us. That is what we ourselves want and what we want from others on the road to a free, just and peaceful Iraq.

We want an Iraq in which unity and plurality are two sides of the same coin. We want an Iraq that returns sovereignty to the individual citizen, not to the leader. We want an Iraq that is secure in its cultural and religious identity and engaged in open dialogue with the world. We want an Iraq that embraces its past while looking to the future — an Iraq that is at peace with itself, its neighbours and with the world. We want an Iraq that will eradicate all Ba'athists once and for all, bring all their officials to justice and prevent them from assuming power again.

(*spoke in English*)

I stand before the Assembly as the representative of a free Iraq. To all those here who helped us in our struggle for liberation, we extend our gratitude. Our

liberation would not have been achieved without the determination of President George W. Bush and the commitment of the coalition, at the forefront of which stand the people of the United States of American and Great Britain. The Iraqis will never forget their courage and sacrifice on our behalf.

To those who stood with the dictator and who continued to question to intentions of the American and British Governments in undertaking this liberation — we invite you to come and visit the mass graves where half a million of our citizens lie. Come and visit the dried-up marshes. Come and visit Halabja, where chemicals were dropped on civilians. Come and examine the lists of the disappeared, whose right to life was taken from them by Saddam Hussain, and we, the Iraqi people, will ask you why you chose to remain silent. We are here today to declare that a new Iraq has been born — an Iraq in which dignity, justice and human rights are assured for all citizens, an Iraq at peace with its people, its neighbours and the world, an Iraq that stands ready to regain its rightful place in the international community of free and proud nations.

Statement by the President

The President: We have come to the end of the general debate of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. It is noteworthy that this session attracted the highest level of participation since the Millennium Summit. Among the 189 speakers, the Assembly heard 50 heads of State, 27 heads of Government and 94 Deputy Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers.

I express my sincere appreciation to every head of State or Government, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister for their active participation, their constructive contribution to the debate and their support for my stated priorities.

When I opened this general debate, I indicated that I would be listening carefully to the priorities identified by high-level participants, which would provide the framework for the Assembly's work. What I have heard gives a clear indication of where Member States are on many of the critical issues that will be before the Assembly.

There was resounding support in the general debate for multilateralism and for the reaffirmation of the United Nations as the primary international Organization to address critical global problems. In fact, many expressed the view that, in these unsettled times, the United Nations and multilateralism were needed now more than ever.

The central role of the General Assembly as advocate and as a supervisory and policy-making body was a point consistently made. However, continuing revitalization efforts were urged, in order to permit the Assembly to deal effectively with challenges both old and new.

Development and the prosperity of countries and regions received much attention from high-level representatives. They supported the view that the fifty-eighth session should give appropriate focus to issues such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, equity in the global economic system and the preservation of the environment. The regrettable outcome of the Cancún round of negotiations gives new impetus to calls for full consideration of development issues by the General Assembly, including the Millennium Development Goals. Some speakers reminded us that the outcome of the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, set for 29 and 30 October 2003, will be critical to the work we will do in the area of development. Therefore, we expect wide representation and high-level participation in the High- Level Dialogue.

Strong support was expressed for the 10-year review of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. This should augur well for the successful review and implementation of its outcome.

Considerable attention was given to Africa's development needs, as well as to the requirement to keep these matters high on the Assembly's agenda. Many stressed the need for continued international support for the implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and for cooperation and support to bring peace and stability to the African continent.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his report on the work of the Organization, gave us thought-provoking insights into his priorities for the coming year. In this context, we have noted the Secretary-General's proposals on United Nations reform, including the establishment of a high-level panel of eminent persons to review these matters for our consideration.

Security Council reform continued to command attention. The general view was that the Assembly should continue this work, notwithstanding the fact that efforts made in this area for more than a decade had not yielded any tangible results.

I do not recall a statement in which the situation in post-war Iraq and the need to urgently address all its aspects were not emphasized as a priority for the United Nations. This was an area in which general support was expressed for initiatives to bring relief to the people of Iraq and to permit them to take responsibility for their own future.

Almost without exception, all condemned the brutal attack on the United Nations premises in Baghdad on 19 August 2003 and the loss of life and injury to United Nations staff. It was agreed that the attack was the latest and most formidable challenge to the United Nations and to the security of United Nations staff. There was support for the Secretary-General's initiative to review the matter of safety and security of United Nations staff.

The situation in the Middle East was considered to be a matter of grave concern. It was thought that the General Assembly could send a strong message to both sides in the conflict — Israel and Palestine — to put an end to bloodshed and violence. Implementation of the proposed road map was seen by many as a viable means of bringing long-lasting peace to the Middle East.

The one-day high-level plenary on HIV/AIDS, which took place on 22 September 2003, immediately preceding the general debate, was considered by all to have been both constructive and productive. The views expressed in both the plenary and the interactive debate underscored the need for a cooperative approach in addressing this most devastating pandemic.

Those are my brief, personal observations of salient issues raised in the general debate, which I thought I should share with the Assembly. As I reviewed the many statements, I was struck by the common ground among speakers over a wide range of issues. This makes me hopeful that we will be able to do good work in the General Assembly during the fifty-eighth session.

Our leaders have given direction to the work we are to do, and political support for it. We must now carry forward the commitments they have made, if the hopes and aspirations expressed are to be realized.

Let me conclude by expressing my sincere appreciation to the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly for their assistance and cooperation in the conduct of the work of the general debate. I wish also to thank the dedicated Secretariat staff, particularly those who have worked with me, and to commend them for their support and cooperation.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 9?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.